

Black eye

Introduction

A black eye is caused when the blood vessels under the skin around the eye burst and blood leaks out

Eye safety

Injury or damage to the eye can be extremely painful and may permanently affect your eyesight

A black eye is bruising to tissue under the skin surrounding your eye.

It is usually caused by a blow to the face, such as a punch, or being hit in the face by a fast moving object, such as a tennis ball.

Sometimes, a black eye can occur after cosmetic surgery to the face, such as a facelift or a nose operation.

The area around the eye turns bluish or purple because tiny blood vessels (capillaries) under the skin burst and blood leaks out into surrounding soft tissue.

Your eye may be painful and swollen and your vision may be temporarily blurred. You may also have a headache and find it difficult to open your eye.

Recovering from a black eye

A black eye is not usually a serious injury.

After a few days, swelling around your eye will start to go down and the bruise will begin to fade.

Like any other bruise, a black eye will usually take about 14 days to heal completely.

When to visit your DOCTOR

You should visit your DOCTOR if you have a black eye and:

you have changes to your vision

the pain in your eye is severe and persistent

your eye is warm, red or leaking pus (these may be signs of infection)

you become forgetful or drowsy

you experience nausea, vomiting and/or dizziness

the swelling does not subside after a few days

It's unusual for a black eye to develop unexpectedly, when there hasn't been an injury, but a possible explanation is high blood pressure causing a capillary to burst, or one of the conditions listed below.

When to go to hospital

Go to the nearest hospital if:

you have two black eyes (this suggests a type of head injury known as a basilar skull fracture)

you lost consciousness at the time of the blow to your head

you have a severe or persistent headache

you have loss of vision

you have double vision

you cannot move your eye

you think something has pierced your eye

your eye is cut or there is blood on the surface of your eye

fluid is leaking from your eye or your eye looks deformed

there is blood or clear fluid leaking from your nose or ears

you are taking blood-thinning medication, such as aspirin, or you have a bleeding disorder, such as haemophilia

Self care

Apply an ice pack to your black eye as soon as possible after the injury. You can use a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a tea towel.

The cold will numb the pain and relieve the swelling by causing tiny blood vessels in the tissue surrounding your eye to narrow. During the first day, you should apply the ice pack to your eye for 20 minutes an hour every hour.

Painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, can be used to help relieve pain. However, avoid using aspirin (unless your doctor advises you to take it) because it thins the blood and can cause increased bleeding.